Gimmicky or effective? The effects of imaginative displays on customers' purchase behavior

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Importantly, the effects of imaginative displays can be explained by the dual mechanisms of affect-based arousal and cognition-based inferred benefits. That is, an imaginative display increases customer arousal and a themed imaginative display leads customers to infer benefits from the display, which increases their purchase behavior. Moreover, the researchers identify a theoretically meaningful and managerially relevant moderator—congruence between display form and perceived product benefit, which can enhance or attenuate the core effects.

There are three major takeaways:

First, an imaginative display represents a cost-effective way to enhance customers' purchase behavior and increase product sales and ROI. This effect applies to both familiar and less familiar brands.

Second, effective imaginative displays have to be both novel and aesthetically appealing, which highlights the overlooked aesthetic element in innovative design.

Third, the inferred benefits of imaginative displays are context-dependent. For a themed imaginative display (i.e., has a particular shape mimicking an object), the retailer should ensure that the display form is congruent with the perceived product benefit to increase purchase behavior. Incongruence between display form and product benefit would backfire.

The authors observe that "Our findings not only explain why some retailers utilize 'gimmicky' imaginative displays, but also provide evidence on the processes and boundary conditions of these displays to favorably influence customers' purchase behavior and increase product sales at relatively
low costs."


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